

**REPORT  
OF THE  
SENATE BLUE RIBBON PANEL  
ON  
IMMIGRATION**



**January 31, 2013**

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January 31, 2013

The Honorable Tom Dempsey, President Pro Tem of the Senate  
State Capitol Building, Room 326  
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Dear Mr. President:

The Senate Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigration has met, taken testimony, deliberated, and concluded its study on immigration issues in Missouri. The undersigned members of the Panel are pleased to submit the attached report.

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Senator John Lamping, Chair

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Senator Will Kraus

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Senator Mike Kehoe

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Senator Maria Chappelle-Nadal

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Senator Shalonn “Kiki” Curls

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## I. Charge of the Panel

Pursuant to Article III, Section 22 of the Missouri Constitution, Senate President Pro Tem Robert Mayer established the Senate Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigration to study Missouri's current immigration policies and make recommendations to strengthen laws. The duties of panel were to study:

- (1) Eligibility for public benefits;
- (2) Education benefits;
- (3) Proof of citizenship or lawful presence for driving privileges; and
- (4) Involvement in state contracts.

## II. Panel Activities

The President Pro Tem of the Senate appointed Senator John Lamping, Senator Will Kraus, Senator Mike Kehoe, Senator Maria Chappelle-Nadal, and Senator Shalonn "Kiki" Curls, with Senator John Lamping selected as the chair.

Over the course of several weeks, the Senate Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigration held public hearings, solicited public testimony, and developed recommendations. Hearings were held on the following dates:

- November 15, 2012 – RCGA Regional Collaboration Center, St. Louis
- November 30, 2012 – Bruce R. Watkins Cultural Heritage Center, Kansas City
- December 13, 2012 – Senate Committee Room #1, State Capitol Building

### A. Summary of November 15<sup>th</sup> Meeting – St. Louis

The panel heard testimony from the following people:

- 1) Dr. Jack Strauss – St. Louis University Simon Center for Regional Forecasting, Director

Dr. Strauss explained how immigrants make a positive economic impact to the both the St. Louis region and the state as a whole. He believes that the slow economic growth in St. Louis and Missouri is partially due to a lack of immigration.

Immigrants supply labor and bring special skill sets to the work force. Dr. Strauss used the Washington University genetics program as an example, where fifty percent of the employees are immigrants. Some employers have to recruit internationally to bring in workers with the correct skill set. Immigrants in the St. Louis region are three times more likely to be high skilled versus low skilled.

Dr. Strauss stated that immigrants are twice as likely to be entrepreneurs compared to native born Americans. Studies have shown that areas with higher immigration also have a higher employment rate for African Americans. Poor immigrants are also less likely to receive food stamps or public assistance than native born Americans.

2) Robert Fox – Casa de Salud, Chairman of the Board

Mr. Fox testified in favor of programs to work with immigrants. He suggested that Missouri adopt a welcoming program similar to Illinois's Welcoming Center. Mr. Fox referenced the fact that the Illinois side of the St. Louis metropolitan area has a higher concentration of immigrants than the Missouri side of the region.

He also advocated in favor of expansion of English as a Second Language programs. Many such programs are tied to schools. The programs should be expanded beyond school age children and to a year round program. The largest arrival months for refugees are May through July which are also months when schools are not in session. Better identification of immigrant students' educational needs would be beneficial, as their previous education may not match that of similarly aged American children.

3) Anna Crosslin – International Institute of St. Louis, President and CEO

The International Institute of St. Louis has been existence for more than ninety years and assists immigrants in the St. Louis region. Ms. Crosslin's testimony was based mostly on her work with refugees. Nationally, the percentage of the population that is foreign born is 12%. In St. Louis the percentage is 4.5%. In Missouri statewide, the percentage is 3.5%. St. Louis as a city is 21<sup>st</sup> nationally in attracting refugees. Refugees often come to the United States with valuable skill sets that are underutilized once here. For example, a dentist refugee cannot practice dentistry in Missouri without going back to dental school. In other states, the individual is only required to pass an exam.

4) Kathy Osborn –St. Louis Regional Business Council, Director

Ms. Osborn advocated for action today to better plan for the future. There are many different cultural based business organizations in the St. Louis region such as the Bosnian Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Asian Chamber of Commerce. These business groups help small businesses. Both the state and local governments should be more welcoming to these businesses.

5) Economic Development Panel – Denny Coleman, Rodney Crim & Joe Reagan

Dr. Jack Strauss published a study on the economic impact of immigration. Following the study, City of St. Louis Mayor Francis Slay and St. Louis County Executive Charlie Dooley created an economic panel. The steering committee of the panel was led by three co-chairs: Denny Coleman who is the President and CEO of St. Louis Development Corporation, Rodney Crim who is the Executive Director of St. Louis Development Corporation, and Joe Reagan who is the President and CEO of St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association.

Mr. Reagan testified that St. Louis has a great location, but that alone is not enough to compete for top talent. St. Louis is competitive in financial services, healthcare, and biological sciences. St. Louis's weakness is population growth. Mr. Coleman reiterated that the foreign born in St. Louis are more likely to be entrepreneurs. He mentioned that George Paz, the founder of Express Scripts, is a second generation immigrant. Mr. Crim noted that historically, the St. Louis region has been very welcoming of immigrants, but that perception has changed in recent years. The St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association provides volunteer immigration attorneys to assist immigrants with naturalization issues.

6) Nancy Lisker – American Jewish Committee, Director of the St. Louis Office

Ms. Lisker presented the video “Immigration: A Jewish Issue”. She also commented that her organization has worked to support their Latino partners.

7) Ciléia Miranda-Yuen – Latino Legacy Project

Ms. Miranda-Yuen presented a slide show to draw attention to the direct relationship between social trust and economic prosperity. Trust is what allows individuals to collaborate and move toward a stronger economy. She also debunked the myth that immigrants cause a high percentage of crime. She indicated that native born individuals cause crime at a higher rate than foreign born.

8) Jelena Mujanovic – Catholic Charities

Ms. Mujanovic is a Bosnian refugee who came to the United States in 1996. She hopes that any potential legislation will focus on all immigrants, not just the highly skilled. When individuals immigrate to the United States, they often come in groups with various skill levels.

9) Karen Aroesty – Anti-Defamation League, Regional Director

Ms. Aroesty recommended that the panel look at the 2000 Aspen Institute study on structural racism. An example provided by the study detailed a centralized way for corporations to address immigration issues. Her group has been working on draft legislation about biased based policing.

10) Juan Montana – Missouri Immigrant and Refugees Advocates

Mr. Montana is a Colombian immigrant and Ph.D. candidate at Washington University. He also owns a photography studio. He began working with MIRA after Arizona passed their immigration reform laws. He stated that one of the keys for successful assimilation into American culture is for meaningful interaction between immigrants and native born Americans. He advocated for the driver's license exam to be offered in multiple languages. He also mentioned that proposed legislation that is anti-immigration, regardless of its passage, is harmful in that it generates fear among the immigrant community.

11) Lara Granich – Missouri Jobs with Justice

Ms. Granich testified that immigrant workers are indispensable to economic growth. Due to our aging population, immigrants help sustain a strong workforce. She cautioned though that the economic benefits of low-skilled immigrants are limited to their employers if the immigrants don't have access to resources.

12) Giovanni Madriz – St. Cecilia Catholic Church

Mr. Madriz mentioned that the skills of immigrants are underutilized. Those that have difficulty assimilating to American culture are unlikely to fulfill their original vocation in the United States. Those that have difficulty learning English are more likely to be pushed underground and kept out of the public. He is concerned about having to justify his presence to everyone, even though he is documented. He also mentioned the problem of families being split up due to some members having to go back to their country of origin to get affairs in order.

13) Rebecca Feldman – Legal Services of Eastern Missouri

Ms. Feldman is an attorney with LSEM. Part of her job is to guide immigrants through complex immigration laws. She indicated two legal areas that provide obstacles to immigrants. The first is access to justice for immigrant crime victims. Immigrant crime victims are sometimes fearful of the government.

The second legal area providing obstacles to immigrants is driver's exam laws. If the exam is offered only in English, it becomes more difficult for those just beginning to learn English to pass. Some licensing offices are confused as to which documents are sufficient to prove legal immigrant status. Some immigrants are only given temporary licenses, so the individual must return to the licensing office year after year. Lack of a driver's license impedes lawful immigrants from contributing to the economy.

14) Kenneth Schmitt – American Immigration Lawyer Association

Mr. Schmitt provided three suggestions for the panel. The first is to be more like Chicago with their welcoming attitude towards immigrants. The second is that the immigration area needs strong leadership to guide good legislation and educate the public. The third is to create something similar to what Utah did in 2011 with their Utah Compact. That compact created five principles to guide Utah's immigration study. The compact was signed by business leaders, religious organizations, and community leaders.

15) James Qin

Mr. Qin immigrated to the United States from Shanghai, China. He is a board member for the United Way. He would like to see the Multicultural Cabinet of the United Way included in more of the St. Louis region's immigration discussions and work.

16) Feliz R. Tovar – Hispanic Community of St. Louis

Mr. Tovar encouraged the panel to discuss with their fellow legislators the importance of immigration.

17) F. Javier Orozco – Archdiocese of St. Louis Missouri and the Missouri Catholic Conference

Mr. Orozco testified that the catholic conference supports immigration in the United States.

18) Antonio Maldonado – Hispanic Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan St. Louis

Mr. Maldonado recommended that more state, county, and city meetings be held or translated into Spanish. He also recommended that presentations on how to start businesses be presented in Spanish.

19) Sylvie Le Bouthillier

Ms. Le Bouthillier was a certified public accountant in Canada before immigrating to the United States for her job. She indicated that immigrating was a stressful experience and is not sure she would do it again. Immigrants find it difficult to assimilate in the St. Louis region because it is a close knit community, with some placing importance on where individuals attended high school.

20) Eileen Wolfington – Professional Latino Action Network

Ms. Wolfington would like to see a more welcoming attitude for both immigrants and any strangers. She mentioned how all of us have immigrant ancestors.

B. Summary of November 30<sup>th</sup> meeting – Kansas City

The panel heard testimony from the following people:

1) Damon Daniel – Communities Creating Opportunities

Mr. Daniel testified to the importance of stability among neighborhoods and families of immigrants. He also spoke of the importance of building upon the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program within the state of Missouri. Mr. Daniel also stated that currently there is no direct pathway to legalized citizenship, but that Missouri can be a leader by recognizing the benefits and productivity of immigrants.



2) Rebecca Hinman & Gustavo Valdez – Diocese of Kansas City – St. Joseph

Ms. Hinman and Mr. Valdez testified together on behalf of the Diocese. They suggested the need for more accommodations for immigrants. These accommodations include: making more English as a Second Language classes available to immigrants, creating a greater awareness of immigration attorneys, setting up a small business loan section in banks for immigrants and generally creating a more welcome and less abrasive atmosphere towards immigrants.

3) Joyce Mucci – Federation for American Immigration Reform

Ms. Mucci's testimony focused on the E-verify program for employers to make sure their employees and potential employees are legally allowed to work in the United States. She suggested that it could have been mandatory rather than voluntary.

4) Kansas City Latino Civic Engagement Collaborative

This group suggested that immigration policy be left to the federal government. They pointed to Arizona's enactment of immigration reform and suggested that it has cost the state a large number of jobs.

5) Lynda Callen – Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates

Ms. Callen described the demographics of the immigrant and refugee population in Missouri, stressing that it is a young, consumer population. She also noted that immigrants themselves do not distinguish between documented and undocumented individuals especially when they hear of legislation affecting immigrants.

6) Guadalupe Centers, Inc. – Dr. Theresa Torres, Christina Jasso & Paul Rojas

Guadalupe Centers focuses on children and students. When a parent is deported, the children of the parent may be permanently moved to another home. If the parent is imprisoned, he or she may permanently lose their parental rights. Some of the top high school graduates in the area are immigrants. They cannot afford to go to college since they do not receive in-state tuition. Mr. Rojas encouraged the legislature to look to the federal Dream Act for guidance on how to help immigrant students.

7) Luis Cordova – Kansas City Public Schools

Mr. Cordova's testimony suggested that SB 590 from the 2012 legislative session is unwelcoming to both documented and undocumented immigrants. He also noted that the bill uses the term "alien" rather than the more appropriate term "undocumented."

8) Steve Weitkamp – Jewish Vocational Services

Mr. Weitkamp works with refugees and helps throughout the resettlement process. He suggested that the government should not put obstacles in the way of people who are trying to normalize their settlement.

9) Greg Perry

Mr. Perry testified on behalf of himself, as a resident of eastern Jackson County, Missouri. He stated that Missouri should not compromise on new legislation but should work on enforcing current laws. He presented a markup of HB 1549 (2008) containing his suggestions. He also recommended the e-verify program be mandatory for all business owners.

10) William D. Gordon – Mid America Green Industry Council

Mr. Gordon's testimony centered on the struggles faced by both immigrants and employers. Mr. Gordon owns and operates a landscaping company and one of his greatest challenges is hiring a seasonal workforce. He explained that the H-2B visa program is very complicated and as a result few companies use it. He also noted that in his line of business, it is often necessary for employees to have a valid driver's license, but has difficulty in finding crew members with such license.

11) W. Dale Russell

Mr. Russell testified on his own behalf. He recommended closing borders, deporting criminals, making English the official language and making the e-verify program mandatory. He also suggested the state work to assimilate those immigrants who have resided in Missouri for over 20 years and issuing temporary work permits to those who choose not to become citizens of the state.

12) Frances Semler

Ms. Semler testified to the need for a national identity card.

13) Axel Fuentes – Center for a New Community

Mr. Fuentes testified on his own behalf and as a representative of the Center for a New Community. He noted that the major obstacles he has encountered as an immigrant are access to healthcare and difficulty in obtaining a driver's license.

14) Walter Ramos

Mr. Ramos testified on his own behalf. His testimony centered on the construction company he owns in Kirksville.

15) Daniel Silva – Kansas City Chamber of Commerce

Mr. Silva testified as to the position of the Chamber. The Chamber encourages federal resolutions, not state laws regarding immigration.

16) Victorine Agbor – Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates

Ms. Agbor testified to her experiences being a refugee herself. She noted that while she came to the United States legally, she still often feels under suspicion.

17) Marvin S. Robinson, II

Mr. Robinson testified on his own behalf. He resides in Kansas and works at the Quindaro Underground Railroad Museum in Kansas City.

18) Jessica Piedra – Legal Aid of Western Missouri

Ms. Piedra is an immigration attorney with LAWM. She testified as to the importance of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program.

19) American Immigration Lawyers Association

James Austin testified on behalf of the association. Mr. Austin is an immigration attorney and teaches a course on immigration law at the University of Missouri – Kansas City School of Law. Anthony E. Weigel provided written testimony on behalf of the association. He suggested the process of obtaining a driver's license is difficult for many immigrants. He also advocated the benefits of the DREAM Act for immigrants to continue their education.

20) Mike Marcias

Mr. Marcias submitted written testimony on his own behalf. His testimony centered on refuting certain anti-immigration myths. He stated that most immigrants learn English. Immigrant students that have learned English tend to outperform many native born students. He indicated that immigrants are not taking jobs away from native born citizens but are filling jobs in areas that need workers, such as fruit harvesting. Immigrants are not heavy users of social welfare programs. Illegal immigrants cannot qualify and rarely seek out health care services because they are afraid of deportation. Immigrants do not damage the sense of community and nationality; most current Americans trace their ancestry through immigrants.

### C. Summary of the December 13<sup>th</sup> meeting – Jefferson City

The panel heard testimony from the following people:

#### 1) Feliz Tovar – Hispanic Leaders of St. Louis

Mr. Tovar mentioned the low birthrate in the United States and indicated that immigration would keep growth up. He stated that immigrants grow small business and many are entrepreneurs. He encouraged the legislature to not appear anti-immigrant in both their discussions and the legislation they file. He would like to see immigration policy reformed to make it easier, perhaps an amnesty for those already here. He also indicated that immigration is mostly a federal issue and what we can do at the state level is limited.

#### 2) Tyler McClay – Missouri Catholic Conference

Mr. McClay indicated that the motives to immigrate are typically moral in nature, such as attempting to provide for one's family. We need to protect the human dignity of immigrants, even illegal ones. He would like to make sure the legislature does not impede the ability of his organization to protect human dignity as well as see the legislature pressure Congress to address immigration issues.

#### 3) El Puente – Sister Peggy Bonnot and Sister Guadalupe Ruiz

Sister Bonnot advocated for compassionate laws towards immigrants. She also stressed the need for changes in the driver's license test. Having a driver's license is important for everyday life, especially in communities with limited access to public transportation. Sister Ruiz indicated that the immigration test may be too hard for many non-English speakers and that the number of questions may be too high.

#### 4) Domingo Martinez

Mr. Martinez's testified about some of the positive impacts of immigration. Missouri's population is aging and losing people in the 25-40 year old age group. Immigration brings the average age of the population down and enlarges the workforce. There is a demand in Missouri for certain blue collar, lower skill level jobs. Immigrants are able to meet this demand.

Missouri has had large amounts of immigration in the past, the large German population being a prime example. Today most second generation immigrants are fluent in English, but that was not always the case. Some of the German-American immigrants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century didn't learn English for several generations, the onset of World War I being the motivating factor for many to learn English.

#### 5) Vanessa Crawford Aragón – Missouri Immigrant and Refugee Advocates

Ms. Crawford Aragón suggested the panel look into three specific areas. The first was police profiling of immigrants. She indicated that there may be instances where persons are

misabeled as white to avoid the appearance of profiling. The second was the ability of immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. Many local offices are unfamiliar with the required paperwork. The third is the perceived anti-immigrant stance of the General Assembly.

6) Doug Rau – Immigration and Innovation Steering Committee

Mr. Rau works in the human resource department for his company and testified about the need for a global workforce. His company seeks out bilingual or multilingual individuals. They also struggle to find qualified employees and must expand their search globally.

### III. Recommendations

The Senate Blue Ribbon Panel on Immigration recommends the following issues be considered during the 2013 legislative session:

A. Foster a more welcoming atmosphere for immigrants

Many witnesses, both community leaders and new immigrants, stated that Missouri does not exhibit a welcoming atmosphere towards immigrants. This has a negative impact on both immigrants themselves and our local economy. When immigrants do not feel welcome in a community, it becomes more difficult to attract foreigners to become a part of the local workforce. Many studies show that immigrants often come to Missouri with a specialized skill set, but may become discouraged from joining the local workforce due to an abrasive and unwelcoming environment.

B. Improve access to resources that would facilitate assimilation

Access to driver's licenses needs to be improved. The Panel heard several reports of eligible non-citizens who did not receive a driver's license, even when correct documentation was presented. It is believed that this occurs due to errors by DMV employees and a misunderstanding of which documents may be used to obtain a license.

Adults should have access to English as a Second Language classes. Much of the personal testimony heard by the Panel referred to difficulties in accessing resources that would aid in assimilation. In particular, many witnesses testified to the fact that it is very difficult to find an English as a Second Language class in their local communities. One suggestion was to take a statewide approach to facilitating these classes, rather than rely on local school districts and organizations.

C. Enter into an Immigration Compact

Several witnesses testified on the effectiveness of the Utah Compact. The Utah Compact is a document based on the values of the people of Utah and expresses five principles to be used as guidance in the discussion of immigration policy in Utah. The Compact is signed by

community leaders, law enforcement, business associations and the religious community. Our Panel recommends the state of Missouri consider developing a similar compact.

D. Encourage the federal government to pass immigration reforms and enforce the law

Many witnesses stressed that immigration policies are a federal issue. Lack of federal direction and lack of enforcement on specific laws hurt the immigrant community and make it difficult for states to grow legal immigrant populations. We encourage our federal legislators to tackle the difficult process of reforming our national immigration laws and ensure that those laws are followed.